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C O N F I D E N T I A L CASABLANCA 000181

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, INR/NESA/NAP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/11/2017  
TAGS: [MO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#)  
SUBJECT: VOTE BUYING IN HAHA AND OTHER  
CAMPAIGN STORIES

REF: A) Rabat 1274  
B) Rabat 1248

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer  
Charles Cole for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During a recent visit to three coastal cities and numerous villages south of Casablanca, Poloff and PD FSN discovered a general lack of interest for the upcoming parliamentary elections, despite the fact that campaign season was in full swing. The dearth of enthusiasm was blamed on the voters' lack of confidence in the candidates and parliament as a whole and a general feeling of helplessness. Corruption, all conceded, is still an issue and expected at some level throughout the country but nearly everyone we spoke to was convinced that this year the elections will be less corrupt than any in recent memory.

¶2. (C) Most Moroccans said observers were welcome in their region but questioned the actual benefit of having them present. We felt a little apprehension about the observers from a few campaigners who were uncertain about their actual role. Concerns also surrounded campaigning and election rules since very few candidates seemed to have a full grasp of what the law allows and what it does not. End Summary.

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Summer in the Cities  
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¶3. (C) While visiting the coastal tourist city of Essaouira, we had the opportunity to follow one candidate, Asma Chaabi, while she visited a local slum to speak with residents. First time Parliamentary candidate Chaabi, is currently the city's Mayor and a member of the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS). We sat with Chaabi in a room full of women in a very poor neighborhood while she fielded questions about jobs and medical care until a young local man battled

his way in and began a verbal attack. He asked Chaabi where she had been since she became mayor and what she was going to do for him if she was elected to Parliament. Chaabi responded with a basic civics lesson on Morocco's government system and how it served the people. She explained to us later that unlike other candidates she will not lie and make unrealistic promises in order to be elected and believes this strategy will win over the voters.

14. (C) The question as to a candidate's whereabouts since the last election was one we heard many times during our three day trip. Evidently, many citizens feel abandoned by their representatives after the elections. As for Chaabi, while there were other candidates running in the region most people were certain that she and her father, also running in Essaouira, would win. Some we talked to, however, thought that while the region needed. A factor, according to a local journalist, that may lead to a surprise showing by the Party of the Unified Socialist Left.

15. (C) In the cities of Safi and El Jadida we were surprised to see the lack campaigning nearly halfway through the two week campaign season. The absence of activity in El Jadida was explained away by a journalist as fear. He said he had heard rumors that the candidates and party officials thought their phones were tapped and that their activities were being monitored. Although they denied any wrongdoing, they were overly cautious about taking any chances.

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Corruption rumored in Haha but Under Pressure Everywhere  
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16. (C) The consensus during our trip was that while corruption and vote buying would always exist, it is far less prevalent this year than in the past. According to several NGO leaders in the Berber region of Haha, however, rumors of corruption are widespread. We heard that one candidate is reportedly getting unconventional support from his father, the president of the local commune. Our contact claimed that the father is not charging the local residents for municipal water delivery in exchange for support for his son. The contact was sure this was risky business since the GOM has switched from negative neutrality to positive neutrality. When asked what he meant by this he said, in the past the GOM stood by while candidates illegally misused government resources to further their campaigns. Now, he said, the authorities are there watching, reporting and stopping corrupt practices.

17. (C) Still, not one person we spoke to believed that there was any way to stop vote buying. Even the pasha of Safi, in charge of election oversight, seemed convince that there was no practicable way to end the practice of vote buying. A local activist in Safi insinuated that while the GOM may be looking more closely into misappropriation of government resources they might turn a semi-blind eye on vote buying. He hinted that if the government cracked down on the practice the percentage of citizens voting would be embarrassingly low.

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Anger in the Souk  
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18. (C) We found many Moroccans demonstrated apathy and total disinterest in the elections while others were livid at the GOM and elected officials. At a large weekly market approximately 65 kilometers outside of Safi, some let their anger be heard. We overheard one young man shouting at a campaigner saying, "I paid 3000 dirhams in taxes last year and got nothing. We have no water, no road, nothing. Bring the King here and I will tell

him that myself.Q Many other we talked to were disgusted or had lost hope in the government and refused to participate in the elections feeling it was a useless exercise.

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What Exactly are the Rules of the Game  
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¶9. (C) A prevailing problem throughout the region was the lack of clarity regarding campaign regulations. In the Haha region, we were met with complaints about one candidate using Qillegal transportationQ to get his campaigners to weekly markets and rallies. The illegal transport, some claimed, took work away from local taxis and the 300 dirhams that the non-professional drivers were paid for the service were considered by some to be a form of bribery. As if to demonstratetheir point one of the locals complaining about the practice told us that a young men campaigning for a local candidate fell out of an Qillegal transportQ truck and died a few days before we arrived in the city.

¶10. (C) Paid supporters caused conflict in the region as well. There seemed to be no clear indication as to where to draw the line between who could be and could not be paid in the campaign. Hired guns, young men paid march for a candidate and distribute party information, were plentiful, a less then surprising situation in region were an unemployment rate of over 50 percent is not unusual at certain times of the year. A number of campaigners we spoke to who were handing out brochures and sporting party tee shirts or baseball QIsnQt that the party program I just gave youQ said one of the few wome we saw out in the villages campaigning when asked for the document. When we replied it was not, she apologized and said she didnQt know because she was illiterate and was just paid to pass out the flyers.

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Observers, Why Not  
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¶11. (C) There was no objection to the presence of international or domestic observes during the elections and most thought it was an excel idea. We spoke to one NGO leader who showed us a list of violations he had observed in his region in the week since campaigning began. He was eager to meet with international observes to share his notes and Qassist the democratic process.Q Another activist requested a contact number for NDI in order to talk about the observers and see what he cou do to get one in his community.

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The PJD is Pretty Low Key  
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¶12. (C) It was not until the second day of our trip that we saw eviden of a PJD campaign at all. In the Essaouira region we were told by a lo journalist that there was one PJD candidate and that he was not expecte well. The candidate, he said, had been a classmate and Qwas never real back then.Q In the coastal city of Safi we met with two candidates at headquarters and witnessed a small rally in a middle-class neighborhood The party was well organized and emphasized their desire to see a clean corruption free election. While Istiglal is expected to retain its hol many people we spoke to in town though the PJD could have a strong show In El Jadida, a PJD presence was only evident outside the Mosques after Friday prayers passing out pamphlets.

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The Word on Women and Youth  
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¶13. (C) Getting women and youth out to vote has been a focus of the G of many NGOs throughout Morocco. During our three day trip, however, w convinced that little progress has been made in that area. The only yo we encountered who were excited about voting were those working for a c and many of them appeared to be more excited about having a job than co that their candidate was going to make any real changes. NGO leaders d us that women in the area were changing and becoming more aware of thei However, in the small weekly markets we visited in poor Berber and Arab we saw very few women present to hear the campaign speeches. We were al that the illiteracy rate for the local women was extremely high prevent from reading about the party platforms. Consequently, it appears that,

the local village elders told us, women will vote but only as directed  
their husbands or family members.

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Comment  
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¶14. (C) There is clearly a great deal of apathy in the regions we visi  
regarding the September 7 elections. We saw very little evidence of ca  
just one week before the elections and almost no enthusiasm by the citi  
From what we were told, an big upset in any district would be highly un  
despite the dissatisfaction we heard from some about their current situ  
As a butcher at a local market day put it, QThose people in parliament  
rich they could tile this whole market and I donQt even  
have shoes for my donkey. But what can we do?Q

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